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How to Find Relics

BY CHARLES A. PHILHOWER

This is the twelfth and last in a series of articles about the Indians who once populated this state, written especially for The Newark Sunday News Magazine by Charles A. Philhower, authority on Indian lore.

SEARCHING for Indian relics in the black earth is like reading a great book of which there is only one in the whole world and destroying each page as you read it. Therefore, those who dig for relics should exercise the utmost care in making notes, measurements, pictures and drawings so that valuable information may not be lost forever.

Finding things once made and used by the redskins who roamed New Jersey many years ago has been my lifelong hobby. It is a pastime which not only gets the enthusiast out of doors but also provides a never-ending source of pleasure as the collection of Indian artifacts grows.

Although many thousand Indian articles have been found in this state since the redskins departed, there still are many thousand relics lying around which have been waiting for hundreds of years to be picked up.

PERHAPS the most important thing to remember in searching for Indian relics is to make a record of each find, associating the object with the place where it is found. It is only through this method that you can later catalogue your collection and determine which Indian tribe left the article where you discover it. It also is important not to trespass on private property in search of relics without first obtaining permission from the owner. Another important thing is to know what you are looking for.

The author was hunting in a plowed field along the Lehigh River on one occasion with the German owner of the farm. He asked:

"Vat you looking for?"

"Arrowheads," I replied, "do you ever find any here?"

"Ya, Ya," he declared, "We find lots of arrowheads."

"Did you ever find an axe?" I asked.

"Ya," came the immediate reply, "We find axe too."

After more searching I asked the farmer if he had ever found an Indian pipe.

"Did you say pipe?" he queried with a bit of excitement in his voice. "I never found a pipe. You know, I never look for pipe."

The moral of this story is that we find what we are looking for.

IF you are looking for arrowheads it will help to know that such finds are stray, workshop, village site, burial, camp site, quarry product, rock shelter or cache in character. A stray means one. On workshop sites, villages, in burials, camp sites and rock shelters, many flints may be found. Cache finds have numbered in the thousands.

The great concern of an archeologist is to locate Indian village sites. There the irrefutable evidence of Indian life is found. There are found graves, for the redskins usually buried their dead where they lived or near by. On a village site both human and dog burials are found. The human burials of Lenape sites usually are flexed, that is, the knees and arms are doubled up and the head bent down.

But, you say, how do you find a village site? Such a site has four indices—broken stones cracked by contact with fire, flakes of flint from making and re-flaking arrows and objects of flint, fragments of broken pottery, and black earth.

Black earth is the residue of Indian occupation. It is indestructible and contains volumes of information if you search it out. It is not to be confused with marsh earth or the black dirt of onion lands, but it is black earth found where there ordinarily should be shore sand, river sand or glacial sand. Man living on sandy knolls leaves behind black earth, stained by the residue of charcoal and decayed animal and vegetable matter. This black earth is the telltale evidence of the one-time presence of men.

Our Indians were pit diggers and consequently they located where there was easy digging, having only their hands and hoes made of wood with blades of stone and shell with which to dig. They dug pits for storing food, pits in which to cook their food, fire pits in their wigwams, pits for ceremonial purposes, garbage and refuse pits and burial pits. A village site of extensive use should produce all of these types. Over a period of years these pits have become filled with earth which shows a disturbed character.

CORN was charred, mixed with bear's fat and stored in hand-made clay pots which were placed in pits for future use. Most of these pits now reveal only disturbed earth when dug out but occasionally one will be found which contains the fragments of a

Girl Scouts from Troop 36, Maplewood, display Indian relics from Mr. Philhower's collection.

AT LEFT: Patty Massie holds a "bockie" (box) made by the redskins.

ABOVE: Looking into a fike basket used by the Lenpaes in catching eels is Ursula Boedecker.

TOP RIGHT: Susan Kunca holds skull of redskin. Girls are studing Jersey Indian lore through this series of articles.

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in Black Earth

broken storage pot. This is because the corn and fat frequently would harden and in consequence the squaw was forced to break the pot to get out the food for the hungry mouths in camp. Cooking pits also sometimes contain pots broken in use.

On one occasion the author found nearly all the fragments of six broken pots in one pit. This was an exciting experience. Among these pots was a large one with an elaborately decorated collar. I have reconstructed it for my collection.

Garbage pits have unstratified dark earth varying sometimes to pockets of very black deposits. Unusual ornaments of a fine character rarely are found in this type of pit. Ceremonial pits are captivating and highly enlightening but the objects in them usually have been broken, burned or mutilated in sacrificial ceremony. Three most unusual pits of this category with very elaborate heads of combs, bear claws and fragmentary pipes and other ceremonial objects have been found along the Delaware in the Minisink country.

Fire pits in the wigwams were sunk deeper into the ground as the weather grew colder. They indicate how the [illegible] took advantage of natural situations. A little fire in a deep pit creates a body of hot air and acts as a kind of stove around which a number of persons could keep warm. Then, too, the draft for the fire is stronger in a deep pit.

BURIAL pits vary from just below the plow depth to six feet. Deep pits sometimes have superimposed burials. It may be that they were Winter interments under the wigwams. There often is evidence of grave linings or encasements made of boughs or bark. The Munsees usually buried their dead with the head to the North.

It is common belief that the personal ornaments an Indian owned at his death were buried with his body. The writer has happened upon many burials in his diggings in Lenape land, but has found few articles buried with the dead. However, historic contact material sometimes is present such as glass beads, Dutch trade pipes, looking glasses, combs, files, iron axes, buttons, sheet copper, lead bullets and the like. Old burials, however, rarely have objects of Indian manufacture in them. This may be because the possessions of a redskin were so scarce that other members of his family could make good use of these articles.

The writer once unearthed a small pot with a child burial. I also have found a beautiful stone ornament with a face in relief with one body while in another grave not far distant was found a pewter pipe 22 inches long. Strings of glass beads and pipes also are sometimes found in burials. Most of these articles were traded to the Indians by early white settlers.

In most cases it appears that the Indian skulls have been crushed. This probably is because the redskins often threw heavy stones over the body to keep wild animals from molesting the graves. Then the bodies were covered over with loose earth. Sometimes dogs are found buried with Indians. In one grave a dog lay at the head and another at the feet of a brave. In another grave, the dog was placed under the small of the back.

THERE are three common methods of procedure used in digging through an Indian village site—horizontal, vertical and spot testing. First, a compass survey is made to locate the site and then the area is laid out on paper in squares. A map is made to scale for locating objects found.

In the horizontal method, the soil is removed by layers. Careful notes should be taken of color variation in the soil, character of earth and the location of artifacts. Where posts have been set in the earth the dark earth of the camp site falls into the hole as the post decays, making a cast of the base of the post. These patches of dark earth indicate the position of the wigwams or shelters in the

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AT LEFT: Gail Hamhauser sweeps a straw mat with "boender." These were made and used by Jersey Indians. ABOVE: Susan Baetzner demonstrates how redskins drank out of crude bowls while Till MacCarthy and Janet Pitfield show how they used hand-carved wooden spoons to scoop food out of cooking pot.

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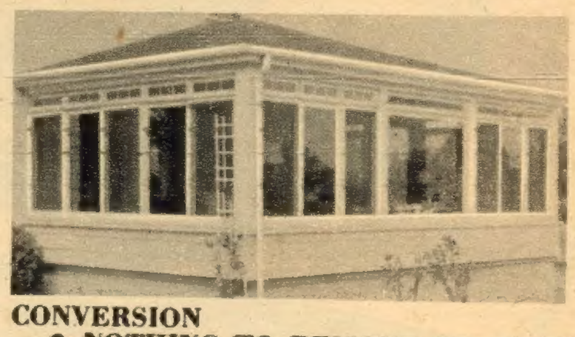

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Jersey Indians

The author, at right above, bends over a Munsee Indian's skeleton he found while digging in a village site along the Delaware River. Photo shows typical method used by archeologists in unearthing relics. The photo of Jersey Indian implements, at left above, is from Newark Museum collection. It includes stone pendant, knife, sinker for fishing, two stone chisels, pieces of pottery dishes, a cooking pot, spearhead, different types of arrows, a hammerhead, grinding dish and a pestle. All these implements were made and used by Jersey's early natives.

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village. Posts marking graves and others slantingly set over cooking pits to hold pots are easily identified.

In the vertical procedure, digging starts as a straight trench about as deep as there is evidence of artificial disturbance or a little below. As progress is made through the face of the "dig," notes and measurements are recorded so that the net result is practically as conclusive as the maps made in the horizontal procedure.

IN making a spot survey, a prospecting rod is used to locate pits of various kinds and each pit is dug individually. Surveys are sometimes made and pits are dug at uniform distances to determine the possibilities of the site.

But not all Indian relics are found in the ground. The writer has made some valuable discoveries in attics where artifacts have been stored for generations since they were handed down from redskin to white man. In fact, the arts of the original natives still persist in some parts of the state, practiced by people whose forebears learned the skills directly from the Indians. Basket-making is one of these skills. Splints wrought out of water ash, white oak and tulip popular were used by the redskins to produce various types of splintware including mats, sieves and all kinds of baskets from small wall baskets and "catch-alls" to large corn baskets and great steamer baskets. Many of these items generations old still are found in homes throughout Jersey today.

Large splint mats were bartered from the Indians by the whites for covering the cords in the old post beds. Bark boxes sewed together with slippery elm fiber called "bockies" by the Dutch were made by the Indians. These products were tastefully and beautifully decorated with colorful designs stamped on the staves with dies carved into the smooth side of a potato cut in half. The red dye came from tagalder, yellow from sumac, black from butternut, purple from pokeberry and blue from huckleberry. The author has found all of these in recent years.

THERE were many other objects of wood such as masks, scoops, wooden shovels, ladles, long-handled stirring spoons wrought from the soft wood of the linden tree made by the la[illegible] Indians. Prominent [illegible] these objects are the big bailing scoops which are compulsory equipment for the lifeboats of big liners even today. The heels of these bailers must be made by hand since machine turned heels always crack. Kegs were made from the hollow trunks of gum trees and splint brushes and brooms from the ironwood or hop tree. The Dutch called these brushes and brooms "boenders." Articles also were made of cornhusks such as masks, shoes called skippacks by the Indians, and mats. On the stoop floor outside the main entrance of a colonial home a cornhusk mat was placed on which to clean the mud from shoes and boots. The writer's grandmother was adept in making these mats and one was always found at her door. I have one in my collection.

So even if you are not interested in digging in the black earth for Indian relics, you should be able to find some redskin artifacts about if you search diligently. But the real thrill comes in finding the cracked stones of camp fires, the flakes of flint left by the arrowmakers, the pottery fragments dropped by the squaws and the bones of a dead Indian. The authentic information gaining from digging in the black earth aids greatly in understanding the life and habits of the people who populated Jersey long before white man.

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